RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

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EXAMINING THE HOUSING CHOICES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Introduction

This study, carried out under the CMHC External Research Program, examines the living arrangements and housing preferences of individuals with mobility and/or agility disabilities living in Regina, Saskatchewan.

The objectives of the study were to:

- describe the current living arrangements of individuals with disabilities living in Regina
- determine if there are individuals living in Regina that could benefit from more accessible housing
- explain what the term "more accessible housing" means in Regina
- develop a profile of people that could benefit from more accessible housing

Methodology

The target population was individuals aged 15 and over with mobility and/or agility disabilities living in Regina. The Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina, developed the sample for the study. A total of 215 individuals were interviewed, of which 191 lived in households and 24 in institutions. Eight individuals living in households were subsequently screened out during the interview process.

The questionnaires were developed with assistance from the Advisory Committee on Access Housing, individuals with disabilities, organizations that provide services to individuals with disabilities, and developers interested in considering the housing needs of individuals with disabilities.

Other studies, such as the Health and Activity Limitation Study (Statistics Canada), were used as guidance.

All interviews were completed in person. Individuals surveyed were asked a variety of questions about their current living arrangements, desire to move and housing preferences.

Participation in the survey was voluntary.

Findings

Of the 183 individuals living in private households:

- Approximately 64% (118) were female and 36% (65) were male.
- Approximately 54% (98) were aged 64 or less, and 46% (85) were aged 65 or more.
- The majority of respondents had low income in 1999. Over 70% had total household income of less than $35,000, and 26% had total household income of less than $15,000.
- Pensions were the main source of income for the largest number of respondents (46%). Other main sources of income were wages and salaries (21%), social assistance (9%) and disability insurance (8%).
- Approximately 87% used one or more devices or aid to move around. For example, 86 respondents used a wheelchair, 73 used a cane, and 59 required the assistance of a walker.

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Over half (98) of the households were living in single family detached dwellings. Other respondents were living in high-rise or low-rise apartments [25% (48)]; non-profit or subsidized housing [5% (10)]; row houses or town houses [4% (7)] and in other dwelling types such as foster homes, cooperatives, assisted living care homes and retirement complexes [9% (17)]. A higher percentage of seniors (31%) than non-seniors (21%) were living in apartments. Additionally, as the age of the senior increased, the percentage living in apartments increased substantially.

The majority of individuals surveyed use specialized features to enter and leave their dwelling, and had adaptations inside their dwellings. The features ranged from accessible drop-off or pick-up zones [62% (113)]; accessible parking [59% (107)]; ramps or street-level entrances [54% (98)]; grab bars [72% (68)]; widened doorways [44% (41)]; lowered light switches [25% (23)] and sinks and counters [18% (17)].

However, 53% (97) reported that there were features that they needed inside their dwelling, but did not have. These included things as inexpensive as grab bars [16% (30)] and lever door handles [6% (10)], to more costly modifications such as lowered counters, sinks and switches [15% (27)] and widened doorways [14% (25)].

In spite of the need for additional specialized features, the majority of respondents were satisfied (either "very" or "somewhat") with various features of their current living arrangement, including the level of privacy, the neighbourhood, and the inside and outside accessibility.

Among the 183 individuals living in private households, 26% (48) wanted to move, 68% (125) did not want to move, and 6% (10) were not sure.

Age rather than income or other variables most strongly influenced a respondent's desire to move. Approximately 88% (42) of the respondents wanting to move were aged 64 or less. Close to 43% (42) of respondents aged 64 or less wanted to move. This compares to 7% (6) among seniors. Respondents aged 22 to 42 were particularly interested in moving. Approximately 69% (20) of respondents aged 22 to 42 wanted to move.

Respondents living in low-rise apartments were more likely than those in other types of dwellings to want to move. Among the 6 respondents aged 22 to 42 years living in low-rises, 5 wanted to move.

Conclusion

Accessibility inside and outside the dwelling and the condition of the dwelling were strong motivators to move. Close to 33% (28) of the individuals using a manual wheelchair wanted to move.

Respondents wanting to move indicated a number of reasons for not having moved. These included:

- no suitable accommodations [78% (45)]
- cannot afford other accommodations [59% (34)]
- too costly to move [57% (33)]

Most respondents wanting to move indicated that they would need assistance to move, especially help in finding accommodations.

Among the 58 respondents wanting to move/not sure about moving, the preferred types of dwellings were: single family detached dwelling [60% (35)], apartment [21% (12)] and row or townhouse [10% (6)]. Among the 12 respondents preferring an apartment, 8 individuals were aged 22 to 42 years. Among the 20 individuals aged 22 to 42 years and wanting to move, 40% (8) preferred an apartment.

The preferred type of dwelling was heavily influenced by whether the respondent was aged 64 or less years, or aged 65 or more years. For example, 74% (72) of non-seniors and 35% (30) of seniors preferred single family detached dwellings. A high percentage of seniors indicated that an apartment [42% (36)] was their preferred dwelling.

Income also influenced the preferred type of dwelling. As the income of the individual increased, the percentage of individuals preferring a single family detached dwelling generally increased and the percentage preferring an apartment generally decreased. The largest number of individuals wanting a single detached dwelling preferred a single level floor plan, three bedrooms, more than one bathroom, and a kitchen nook and dining room.

Among the 24 respondents living in institutions, most were satisfied with their current living arrangements. Five respondents wanted to move. Four of the respondents wanting to move were aged 45 to 52. One was aged 67. Two respondents preferred a single family detached dwelling. Two preferred an apartment. One preferred a dwelling with disability-related supports.

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The age of an individual with disabilities needs to be considered closely when addressing their housing needs. There are substantial differences between seniors and non-seniors in their levels of satisfaction with their current living arrangements, in their desire to locate to other accommodations, and in their preferred housing types.

There is a substantial percentage of respondents living in housing which they report has limitations. Many of these respondents, however, indicate no interest in locating and moving to other accommodations. Further research, including community consultation, might help to explain this finding.

Information and resources such as accessible housing inventories, counseling and manuals are needed to assist people in their search for suitable accommodations and in their efforts to undertake modifications. Individuals with disabilities should be an integral part of the planning process.

In general comments provided, some individuals noted the need for affordable housing, expressed concerns about the high costs of modifications, and the inadequacy of available grants and current programs to assist with renovations.

The following program and policy options should be considered further:

- an enhanced Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program for Persons with Disabilities
- a more accommodating tax structure to address the added costs of disability
- adequate funding for community-based organizations to enable them to provide accurate information on accessible housing in a community and on making housing accessible
- a course of action be developed after consultation with individuals with disabilities.

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